

Rapid Report: Kherson Regional Art Museum Reported Looting Event

Report Coverage: 31 October 2022 to 3 November 2022



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Executive Summary: This rapid report, prepared as part of the ongoing project under the Conflict Observatory to monitor over 28,000 cultural heritage sites in Ukraine during Russia's invasion, describes an event of reported looting at the Kherson Regional Art Museum in late October and early November 2022. Information about the event was gathered using open sources and high-resolution satellite imagery.

Introduction: The removal of museum collections is seldom identified through satellite imagery analysis. Such documentation requires the serendipitous satellite capture of discrete activity at an historic site or cultural institution. As a result, there are few such cases in the literature.¹ Here, we identify a reported looting event at the Kherson Regional Art Museum, also known as the Oleksi Shovkunenko Art Museum.

Background and summary of the reported looting event: Russia's forces reportedly removed collections without consent from the Kherson Regional Art Museum as they began retreating from the city of Kherson, which had been under their control since 2 March 2022.² The Museum was established in 1978 and is housed in an early twentieth-century city hall. The museum holds more than ten thousand objects, including those donated from St. Petersburg during the period of the Russian Empire, arts and crafts, graphics, paintings, and sculptures from the seventeenth century through the contemporary period.³ There were also reports of looting in mid-May 2022.⁴

¹ AAAS Geospatial Technologies and Human Rights Project. (2015). Mosul, Iraq: Destruction of Nebi Yunis (Tomb of the Prophet Jonah). Available at: www.aaas.org/resources/mosul-iraq-destruction-nebi-yunis-tomb-prophet-jonah.

² Zhukov, Y. (2022). VIINA: Violent incident information from news articles. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies.

³ The Odessa Journal. (2022). The Russian military seized the Kherson Art Museum and appointed its "director". *The Odessa Journal*, 22 July 2022. Available at: <https://odessa-journal.com/the-russian-military-seized-the-kherson-art-museum-and-appointed-its-director/>; Kishkovsky, S. (2022). Russia to take over Ukrainian museum collections as formal annexation plans announced. *The Art Newspaper*, 29 September 2022. Available at: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/09/29/russia-to-take-over-ukrainian-museum-collections-as-formal-annexation-plans-announced>.

⁴ Defence Intelligence of Ukraine, Ministry of Defence of Ukraine. (2022). Окупанти грабують музеї та приватні колекції в Херсонській області, вкрадене вивозять в окупований Крим. Available at: <https://gur.gov.ua/content/okupanty-hrabuiut-muzei-ta-pryvatni-kolektsii-v-khersonskii-oblasti-vkradene-vyvoziat-v-okupovanyi-krym.html> (17 May 2022).; Akinsha, K. (2022). The subtle—and not-so-subtle—sacking of Kherson. *LootedArt.com*, 23 May 2022. Available at: <https://www.lootedart.com/news.php?r=VGXPGV867501>. The Kherson Regional Art Museum director later stated that the museum was captured by Russian forces on 19 July 2022. Pavlenko, I. (2022). Shovkunenko Regional Art Museum, in Kherson, captured by Russian occupiers—Kyiv Post—Ukraine's global voice. *Kyiv Post*, 20 July 2022. Available at: <https://www.kyivpost.com/russias->

Reports from the Kherson Regional Art Museum indicate that the unauthorized removal of the museum's collections occurred between 31 October and 3 November 2022.⁵ The head of the Department for Culture of Kherson City Council, Svitlana Dumynska, and the director of the Kherson Regional Art Museum, Alina Dotsenko, later confirmed these reports, as well as reports of looting at the neighboring Kherson Regional History Museum.⁶ Videos and satellite imagery from **1 November** show white trucks on the side of the Kherson Regional Art Museum and a white van in the courtyard. According to museum officials, the items were not packed or stored properly prior to being loaded onto the trucks.⁷ According to a social media post by the Kherson Regional Art Museum on 7 November, some of the items taken were identified as artworks by Ivan Pokhytonov, Mykhailo Andriienko-Nechytailo, and Gabriel Gluck.⁸ Before Russia's forces fully retreated from the city of Kherson on 11 November,⁹ Andrei Malgin, director of the Central Museum of Tavrida in Simferopol in Russia-occupied Crimea, announced that his museum had received approximately ten thousand items that had been removed from the Kherson Regional Art Museum.¹⁰

[war/_trashed-4.html](#); Kinsella, E. (2022). As Russians "pillage" Ukraine's museums in annexed territories, artifacts are turning up in Moscow and on the black market. *Artnet News*, 3 October 2022. Available at: <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ukraine-museums-pillaged-annexation-2184617>.

⁵ Kishkovsky, S. (2022) Ukrainian forces win back Kherson region—but Russia has reportedly looted its art collection. *The Art Newspaper*, November 11, 2022. Available at: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/11/11/ukraine-wins-back-kherson-russian-looting-art-collection>; Херсонський Художній Музей, (2022, November 4). Херсонський художній музей розграбований російськими окупантами. Це по-їхньому називається «евакуація» [Facebook post] Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/art.museum.ks/posts/pfbid02wJ7gmQs251prJwEBkfFQsMCy9bn2GGNRdU9AxjvKNy7a1TP2atCgcidxEod6QCHL>.

⁶ Bonet, P. (2022). Ukraine reports looting of Kherson museums by Russian troops. *EL PAÍS*, 17 November 2022. Available at: <https://english.elpais.com/international/2022-11-17/ukraine-reports-looting-of-kherson-museums-by-russian-troops.html>; Media Center Ukraine. (2022). Occupiers' goal is to turn Kherson region into a wasteland—Former Kherson residents on Russians' actions in occupied territory. *Media Center Ukraine*, 7 November 2022. Available at: <https://mediacenter.org.ua/strong-occupiers-goal-is-to-turn-kherson-region-into-a-wasteland-former-kherson-residents-on-russians-actions-in-occupied-territory-strong/>.

⁷ The Kyiv Independent news desk. (2022). National Resistance Center: Russia stole 15,000 artworks from Kherson Oblast. *The Kyiv Independent*, 12 November 2022. Available at: <https://kyivindependent.com/news-feed/national-resistance-center-russia-stole-15-000-artworks-from-kherson-oblast>.

⁸ Kishkovsky, S. (2022). Ukrainian forces win back Kherson region—but Russia has reportedly looted its art collection. *The Art Newspaper*, 11 November 2022. Available at: <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/11/11/ukraine-wins-back-kherson-russian-looting-art-collection>; Херсонський Художній Музей. (2022). Твори мистецтва, викрадені окупантською владою з Херсонського художнього музею, одразу ж «засвітитися» [Facebook post]. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/art.museum.ks/posts/pfbid032hDyK7Aaafa2SaXVXdaqzWfFtSiP6b42HjzTe8Kz9cM4yV4WCnew36e9JpJgHTxZl> (7 November 2022).

⁹ Zhukov, Y. (2022). VIINA: Violent incident information from news articles. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies.

¹⁰ Bonet, P. (2022). Ukraine reports looting of Kherson museums by Russian troops. *EL PAÍS*, 17 November 2022. Available at: <https://english.elpais.com/international/2022-11-17/ukraine-reports-looting-of-kherson-museums-by-russian-troops.html>; Beardsworth, J. (2022). Kherson Museum art collection looted ahead of Russian retreat. *The Moscow Times*, 11 November 2022. Available at: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/11/10/kherson-museum-art-collection-looted-ahead-of-russian-retreat-a79342>.

Timeline: On **31 October**, the Kherson Regional Art Museum posted on Facebook that “looting” had started that day. On **1 November**, the museum posted on Facebook that artwork had been loaded onto three trucks and a school bus that were accompanied by armed individuals dressed as civilians.¹¹ The first video of the event was posted on Telegram on **1 November**, showing a white truck in front of the museum.¹² The second video posted on Telegram that day captured a blue truck and a yellow bus parked on Vulytsya Soborna Street in front of the building next to the museum.¹³ A satellite image from **1 November** shows two white trucks and a white van near the museum. On **4 November**, photographs posted on Facebook showed trucks in front of the Central Museum of Tavrida in Simferopol in Russia-occupied Crimea.¹⁴ A photograph captured a blue truck, similar to the one in the second video, in front of the Central Museum of Tavrida, and other images showed artwork being carried into the museum. In a Facebook post on **7 November**, the Kherson Regional Art Museum identified artwork from their collections in photographs taken at the Central Museum of Tavrida.¹⁵

¹¹ Херсонський Художній Музей. (2022). Херсонський художній музей розграбований російськими окупантами. Це по-їхньому називається «евакуація» [Facebook post] Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/art.museum.ks/posts/pfbid02wJ7gmQs251prJwEBkffQsMCy9bn2GGNRdU9AxjvKNy7a1TP2atCgcidxEod6QCHI> (4 November 2022).

¹² @kherson_non_fake. (2022). В Херсоні происходит вывоз / «эвакуация» музея на улице Соборной (музей Шовкуненко). Мародёрство не прекращается и идёт полным ходом. [Telegram post]. Retrieved from: https://t.me/kherson_non_fake/4128; @Cosmonaut19. (1 November 2022).

“In Kherson there is an export / “evacuation” of the museum on Soborna Street (Shovkunenko Museum). Looting does not stop and is in full swing.” Geolocation by @kherson_non_fake: 46.629705, 32.609636 Source: https://t.me/kherson_non_fake/4128. [Twitter post]. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/Cosmonaut19/status/1587453550766223367>.

¹³ @kherson_non_fake. (2022). В Херсоні происходит вывоз / «эвакуация» музея на улице Соборной (музей Шовкуненко). Мародёрство не прекращается и идёт полным ходом. [Telegram post]. Retrieved from: https://t.me/kherson_non_fake/4128; @Cosmonaut19. (1 November 2022).

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¹⁴ Тanya Adams. (2022). Вчора мне написав симферополец. [Facebook post] Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/TanyaAdams75/posts/pfbid0351g82t5GS2aBL9gYtrh1YtxBcVpHf9U6VSt9yivU3pec68v898ktHobxJMGwknP3l> (4 November 2022); Farrell, F. (2022). Empty Kherson art museum in despair after entire collection stolen by Russia. *The Kyiv Independent*, 26 November 2022. Available at: <https://kyivindependent.com/national/empty-kherson-art-museum-in-despair-after-entire-collection-stolen-by-russia>.

¹⁵ Херсонський Художній Музей. (2022). Твори мистецтва, викрадені окупантською владою з Херсонського художнього музею, одразу ж «засвітитися» [Facebook post]. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/art.museum.ks/posts/pfbid032hDyK7Aaafa2SaXVXdaqzWffTSiP6b42HjzTe8Kz9cM4yV4WCnew36e9JpJgHTxZl> (7 November 2022).



Image 1. A high-resolution satellite image from 1 November 2022 shows two white trucks and a white van near the Kherson Regional Art Museum. The location of the white trucks corresponds to the first video described above. In the video, the white trucks are parked facing north on Vorontsovska Street. The video also shows one white truck parked facing south on the same street.



Image 2. The same high-resolution satellite image as Image 1 with annotations, indicating two white trucks and a white van near the Kherson Regional Art Museum on 1 November 2022.

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